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Citation: Sparkes, Andrew, Brown, David H. K. and Partington, Elizabeth (2010) The "Jock Body" and the social construction of space: the performance and positioning of cultural identity. *Space and Culture*, 13 (3). pp. 333-347. ISSN 1206-3312

Published by: SAGE

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1206331210365288>  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1206331210365288>>

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# The "Jock Body" and the Social Construction of Space: The Performance and Positioning of Cultural Identity

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## Abstract

This article draws on data generated from a 3-year ethnographic study of "jock culture" at one university setting in England to illuminate the ways that specific kinds of bodies are located in social space so as to construct a range of identity positions that facilitate the maintenance of this culture over time. These positions are as follows: the jocks, sport scholars, also-rans, anti-jocks, wannabes, and the non-jocks. The analysis revealed how individuals negotiate an embodied identity within a network of power relations, with the performing jock body occupying the most highly visible, yet taken for granted, central space around which all other bodies are positioned according to their ability to meet the combined sporting and social requirements of this culture. The findings have significance for how we understand the ways in which bodies and space are reciprocally constituted along with the dilemmas this poses for individuals within a cultural setting.

## Keywords

jock culture, body, space, identity, ethnography

Students in higher education who study sport and physical education often define themselves, and are defined by others, as "jocks" and members of a "jock culture." This culture has been associated with the production and maintenance of hegemonic forms of heterosexual masculinity via a range of social practices and ideological formations that celebrates mesomorphy, anti-intellectualism, sexism, homophobia, and competitiveness (D. Brown, 2005; L. Brown, 1998, 2005; Flintoff, 1994; McDonald & Kirk, 1999; Skelton, 1993). In her study of students attending a Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) program at one university in Australia, L. Brown (2005) noted that this culture provided an "identity playground hierarchy" in which the freedom to "play" with and construct identities were differentially distributed according to gender. She drew attention to the ways in which the rituals, rules, and behaviors within the social structure of

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PETE were repeated with each new intake so that the jock culture and its associated identities were reproduced and replicated over time by different generations of students.

These rules appeared to be set by a small but dominant group who subscribed to practices associated with hegemonic notions of what it means to be male in a sporting environment. Accordingly, the norms and behaviors of this group influenced the social interactions of students in the PETE program and played a significant role in shaping their perceptions of what were appropriate and accepted identities within that culture. As L. Brown (2005) noted, "These attitudes and 'unspoken' rules appear to be subscribed to and accepted by a significant proportion of both male and female PETE students; whether by choice, or social survival, is an issue of debate" (p. 124).

Our own 3-year ethnographic study of a jock culture that dominates Greenfields (a pseudonym), one of two campuses at a university in England, has likewise highlighted a number of overt and tacit rules in action (Sparkes, Partington, & Brown, 2007). We called these the "Twelve Commandments" as adherence to them led to successful membership of this culture. These were (1) Play high-level university sport; (2) Choose your sport wisely (as some sports are afforded greater status than others); (3) Only exceptional freshers (Year 1 students) make the first team; (4) Be committed to the social life; (5) Excessive alcohol consumption and associated behaviors are obligatory; (6) Respect the hierarchy; (7) Stay established; (8) Look like a jock; (9) Attend socials regularly; (10) Attend postmatch drinking sessions; (11) Credit for time served; and (12) Gain positions of power.

Drawing on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, we argued that these commandments operated as a series of structured and structuring practices<sup>1</sup> that conditioned the bodies of students by appropriating an idealized and internalized jock habitus that was not gender neutral. Rather, these were seen as a practical and symbolic manifestation of a dominant, heterosexual, masculine orientation to the world. We suggested that in spite of seemingly significant processes of accommodation over the years (e.g., going coeducational), the *illusio* (the act of being invested in a social game) of this jock culture remained substantially intact and maintained through a combination of the following: (a) symbolic violence and (b) a systematic embodied complicity on the part of many of the students who had something to gain by avoiding active subordination to, and exclusion from, the dominant group. We suggested that, in combination, the ways that the jock habitus was transmitted over time had consequences for how the individual's body and the body of others were positioned in social space on the Greenfields campus. To explore this issue further, we now focus specifically on the dynamics of the jock body in this particular social space.

## Bodies in Space

According to Löw (2006), spaces are processual and relationally ordered systems. For her, this means that investigating the topological dimensions of one of more cultures no longer means "observing the way structures are *ordered in space* but looking at how these structures *form spaces*" (p. 120). Löw highlighted that space and gender must be grasped as "an effective, reciprocally constructing and constructed structure" (p. 130), and that the body provided a key to understanding their reciprocal constitutional dynamic. Concurring with Löw, we acknowledge that issues relating to gender underpin our analysis. However, our main focus is on the complex dynamics of the jock body in space with a view to raising questions about how Greenfields as a community collectively inhabits a space that has been, over the years, quite literally, *formed* by very specific microlevel gendered, embodied, structures. Indeed, social spaces like Greenfields have been structured in such a way that they facilitate the continuation of the very structures that constructed them initially. For example, the type, location, and spatial organization of facilities, and the habitus of early community members.

Gupta and Ferguson (1992) emphasized that, over time, structured social spaces like Greenfields turn into a *place* with an identity, locality, or community. They defined this as simultaneously being



"a demarcated physical space" and "clusters of interaction" (p. 8), both of which are constructed from the particularities of its underlying structured spatial formations. However, as both they and Löw (2006) acknowledged, this reciprocal process is inevitably infused with power relations in the form of contestation, coalition, and resistance with the body being central to these struggles.

Precisely how power relations become *interwoven* simultaneously with the reciprocal structuring of space (place) and the gendered bodies of its inhabitants is difficult to articulate. Bourdieu (1998), like Löw (2006) agreed that social space is fundamental to understanding power relations because, as both acknowledge, with very few exceptions we cannot fully control social space. In making sense of the relational dynamics involved in the struggle over the reciprocal construction of space, gender, and the body at Greenfields, we have returned to a number of the insights provided by Bourdieu's conceptual work as he has systematically included notions of space, the body, and power relations in his theorizing of the interrelated concepts of habitus, capital, and field.

Developing Merleau-Ponty's articulation of interspaces (spaces between bodies), Bourdieu (1998) saw the key sociospatial dynamic as that relating to difference, or gap. These are "a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through their *mutual exteriority* and their relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through relations of order, such as above, below, *between*." (p. 9). Here, Bourdieu suggests that it is the difference or gap between spaces (interspaces) that provides the momentum for action and interpretation. Consequently, we are sensitive to the notion of *interspace as liminal space*. That is, if social space requires forms of embodied difference to become and remain social spaces, then interspaces can also be seen as the sociospatial regions existing *between* more strongly demarcated and defended spaces and this space might be considered a "no-man's land". These are important because they are spaces that people come to occupy, albeit for the most part temporarily, while their body-identities are being reconfigured, socially validated, and positioned.

If difference provides the stimulus for demarcation of social spaces and thus their construction into encultured places, then it is also important to appreciate *how* these encultured places come to be connected and interwoven into the micro-, meso-, and macrolevels of social organization. Significant here is Bourdieu's (1998) conceptualization of social fields as *spaces of positions* or field as a *space of forces of determinations*. Seen in this way, the notion of field as *demarcated physical* or *symbolic space* becomes a considerably more extensive, permeable, and dynamic concept than that of structure and one which helps Bourdieu to articulate how individuals shape social spaces and, in return, how the material and symbolic conditions of existence within these social spaces shape individuals.

Previously, via an articulation of the 12 commandments of jock culture at Greenfields, we have illustrated how the jocks are strongly conceptualized as being located in a specific social space that is deliberately attached to the outcomes of previous social struggles, and is connected to the present by the actions and values of those with the appropriate schemes of dispositions, or habitus, to appreciate and best use the space they inhabit (Sparkes et al., 2007). In this way we can understand jock cultural space as connected to social time through bodies and more specifically through a valued habitus. Importantly, these logics are highly *practical* in the sense that they are derived from everyday investments into specific spaces within the broader field of sport and physical education in which (male) jocks come to occupy a central location. The practical logics underpinning why some types of bodies get elevated over others in jock culture is related to how that given body is able to *perform* certain sets of valued, legitimized, and practical functions (including the "Twelve Commandments") that ensure the smooth operation and survival of that field in which the jock culture is located.

Our main objective in what follows is to illuminate the sociospatial and hierarchical organization of bodies on the Greenfields campus and reveal how these positions are constructed in, through,



and by material and symbolic social spaces. We hope to show how jock culture not only structures social space, but how this structured social space in turn begins to structure gendered bodies that inhabit this space. Before we present our findings, the methodology that informed the study will be outlined.

## Method

The Greenfields campus has a large undergraduate student intake studying for a Bachelor of Science degree in Sport Science, and a smaller intake studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Physical Education. During 1997-2000, the primary investigator (Elizabeth Partington) undertook an ethnographic study of the jock culture at Greenfields in which she adopted various positions on a participant observer continuum that ranged from complete observer to complete participant.

During the first year of fieldwork, the emphasis was on observing and making field notes of what happened in the public spaces at Greenfields, such as, the student common room and bar, the sports hall, and the gymnasium. A range of sporting events ranging from British University Sports Association (BUSA) matches to intermural matches were also observed. Over time, her role shifted more toward the participant end of the continuum. For example, in the second year of the study, the primary investigator joined the University Ladies' Football Team, and in the third year the University Badminton Team. This allowed her to take part in team trials, participate in BUSA competitions and local league matches, and to attend team "socials" and Athletic Union dinners. In both these situations, the role of overt participant observer was chosen. The status of the primary investigator as a postgraduate student interested in the dynamics of sporting cultures was made known to the members of both teams who agreed that she could join them and make field notes as long as they remained anonymous in any publication that followed.

As the primary investigator became more immersed in the culture of Greenfields and issues began to emerge in relation to how it operated, purposeful sampling was employed to select 30 students for formal interview.<sup>2</sup> These interviews took place at a location chosen by the student. The primary investigator explained the nature of the study, outlined the interview procedure, dealt with ethical issues (e.g., anonymity), and answered any questions. The contents of an informed consent form were then explained and completed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The findings presented below are based on an inductive content analysis of the interview transcripts (Holloway, 1997), and field notes based on observations with a view to deriving themes and constructs from the data. Throughout this process, the role of Andrew Sparkes and David Brown was to act as "critical friends" and provide a theoretical sounding board to encourage reflection on, and exploration of, alternative explanations and interpretations as they emerged in relation to the data.

## Groupings in Space

Our previous analysis of jock culture at Greenfields illustrated how the bodies of the "dominant" jocks and the social orientations they expressed as a group had consequences for the bodies of other people, and influenced the types of social spaces assigned to them according to the physical capital they were judged to possess by the dominant group. Accordingly, the particular physical capital embodied in the jock habitus is a mark of what Bourdieu (1998) calls *distinction* in social space occupied by certain individuals at certain times. The spaces that these bodies occupy interweave to construct the field of struggle that is evident on the Greenfields campus. These bodies are as follows: the jocks, the sport scholars, the also-rans, the anti-jocks, the wannabes, and the non-jocks. In what follows, we explore these bodies, spaces, and their interrelations through the perspectives of those students who have come to occupy various positions.



### *The Elite Space: The Sport Scholars*

Given the high value placed on athletic ability within the jock culture at Greenfields sport scholars occupy the elite space and are afforded significant status. For example, their names and pictures are posted in the main site sports hall as a celebration and reminder of their distinctive position. The space they occupy in relation to jock culture is, however, a curious one as they are not able to adhere to all the 12 Commandments and this militates against their full inclusion into its core. This is because of the different demands placed on them from forces outside of that culture with regard to their responsibilities as sports scholars. For example, they must meet a range of official academic and sport performance-based criteria each year to maintain their scholarship. Therefore, they have to take their sporting performance very seriously as part of an elite group that resides both within and beyond the dominant jock culture. This stress on performance outcomes, and the official surveillance they are subjected to, means they are unable to adhere to a large number of the 12 Commandments (e.g., 1, 4, 5, 9, 10, and 12). As such, sports scholars are often physically removed from the spaces in which many of the jock culture rituals are enacted in particular places (e.g., the bar) at particular times (e.g., after games on Wednesdays).

Sports scholars recognize that they are different from the jocks and can articulate this difference. For them, the jocks play sport for "fun." In contrast, they are "serious" athletes, the talented few who may make a living as a professional performer following graduation and convert their physical capital into economic capital. They already receive financial and sport science support in exchange for their physical capital and a few also receive payment when they play for professional clubs outside the university. In practical and symbolic terms, living in an environment and taking a degree course where jocks dominate constructs the sports scholar as both different and other.

That's the tough thing. People don't really understand what it involves and what you have to do because they're orientated around getting drunk, performing university sport, and having a good laugh. I can't do that all the time . . . With gymnastics there's nothing at all. You go away, you perform, and come back. That's it. You're not allowed to go out. You're not allowed to get drunk. Got to be careful what you eat. (Melissa)

Besides not being able to adhere to the commandments of jock culture, the sports scholars, because of their commitment to elite sport outside of the university, are often unable (or find themselves ineligible) to play in the BUSA competition and so break Commandment 1. In combination, this results in a complex relationship with the jock culture, where scholars come to occupy a different social space. They are at once distinguished but sidelined and never really come to embody jock culture as part of their habitus due to their absence from other key spaces. This is also true of other groups who are connected to but socially differentiated from the core culture on the Greenfields campus due to their inability to convert their physical capital or to have it legitimized. These include the "also-rans," the "anti-jocks," and the "wannabes."

### *The Excluded Space: The Also-Rans*

The also-rans comprise the (relatively few) sport science students who do not have sufficient physical capital to challenge for a place on a university team. This is a significant failure in the eyes of the core culture.

They seem to think "Well, why are you here if you're not playing a sport?" I think part of the reason why I feel like I don't fit in is because I don't play anything. Because you're



made to feel like you don't fit in by not playing anything. I don't socialize in the bar because you get the impression that everyone's staring at you all the time. I've been here two years, and I'm still not perceived as a typical sport scientist, so it's never going to happen. (Rachel)

These students do not have their identities confirmed by the subculture and are effectively excluded. Some may seek confirmation despite initial rejection. For example, having failed to gain selection for BUSA teams, other avenues might be explored to display sporting prowess. However, because BUSA participation is the most highly valued form of engagement, these alternative displays have little impact:

I ended up trying to prove myself through the activities we did. To show them that I could do it, that I was a sportsman. I was fit even though I didn't go and play BUSA. I was beginning to feel that I wasn't accepted on the course. So on the bleep test, everybody dropped out at 12, and I carried on to 14. I felt I had something to prove. It didn't make any difference but at the time it was important to me to show them. (David)

Such individuals are in a difficult situation. They are rejected by the jocks because they cannot adhere to Commandments 1 and 2, which effectively bars them from achieving some of the other commandments (e.g., 3, 7, 10, and 12). Unlike the sports scholars they do not have the level of physical capital that provides them with exemption from these commandments. Finally, they differ from the non-jocks because they *are* sport scientists, and they are "supposed" to have an interest in sport and want to be involved in it.

A lack of presence on a team closes down participation in training sessions, initiation rituals, and other informal processes of socialization that jocks undergo as a collective. For the also-rans this means that social areas occupied by jocks are literally out-of-bounds at specific times. Consequently, the interaction between certain kinds of bodies and the social space available intersects to symbolically and physically include some, exclude others and, importantly, to publicly demarcate insiders from outsiders. The also-rans have a spoiled identity, which will only be made more obvious if they remain in the same physical spaces as the core jock group. Eventually they must recognize that they do not fit in and remove themselves from the spaces occupied by the jocks.

Unlike the non-jocks, the also-rans do not see themselves as a coherent group. They tend to view themselves as individuals rejected by the jocks and often feel the need to find another subculture to accept them. This means forging friendships and establishing oneself within the non-jock culture and requires distancing oneself from the central culture on the campus. Some also-rans remove themselves geographically from the jock culture. For example, David left the Greenfields campus to establish an identity as a sports performer among non-jock students on the main university campus where he chose to live and play a range of sports for his hall teams: "Within the hall of residence where it's a non-sporting culture I'm a sport scientist. Here, I'm seen as the sporty one." Interestingly, by drawing on a classificatory scheme of perception used by jocks, the non-jocks are able to recognize the also-rans and their distinctiveness, particularly in relation to them not adhering to the Twelve Commandments.

But also in the way they dress, I don't think I've ever seen either of them (two friends) in tracksuits and trainers. And I don't think I've ever seen either of them do any sport science fresher bolt thing (drink a pint of beer in one go). They don't play a lot of sport either. Maybe they should be classed as non-jocks even though they're sport scientists. (Isabel)

Although the also-rans might have initially desired to become members of the jock culture, once rejected and distanced from this culture, they often adopt a critical stance toward it. This



is particularly so with regard to the commandments that shape social relations: "I don't see the point in their socials. Socials for me are going out having a laugh with the team you've just played for. Not forcing people into bolting 25 pints. I see it as very much like bullying" (Rachel).

In many ways, the rejection of jock culture by the also-rans is motivated by their exclusion from the collective jock cultural space which they once tried to join. Thus, their spoiled identities, in part, stem from their inability to successfully convert physical capital into other forms of capital. The space they come to occupy is invariably excluded and they are denied the opportunity to buy into the *illusio* of jock culture. Moreover, at certain times these antecedents come together within the physical space dominated by the core jock culture to publicly expose and highlight their exclusion.

### *Antagonistic Space: The Anti-Jocks*

The anti-jocks, although not possessing the physical capital to be sport scholars, did have the ability to play for BUSA teams and meet Commandments 1 and 2. However, they chose to break some of the other commandments (e.g., 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10). For example, with regard to breaking Commandment 6, Mike commented, "I don't like hierarchy; I don't like people who have what I consider to be false authority . . . they think that they are the proverbial dog's bollocks . . . and that just does my head in." For others, in spite of their initial acceptance, the *illusio* wears off and questions regarding the practical transmission of the commandments arise over time with regard to their often demeaning nature.

I look at it now and think "What are you doing to some people?" There's even people on the sports teams that don't want to do it. Probably sat there in fear, they're absolutely petrified of being there. And that's not right. People probably end up drinking five or six times more than they ever intended to drink when they go in there. People make themselves ill, and I just think "No, I don't want to be part of that anymore." But, it takes time to see that. I didn't see it to begin with and it took me about two years to see it. (Becky)

At times, however, anti-jocks directly challenge the culture in a public setting.

I was up on the table, trousers round my ankles, and they were all doing their funnel bolting things, and I had lemonade in mine coz I just said I'm not drinking. But, one of the senior lads, started pouring vodka in to the thing, and I just spat it out. Looking back it was comical. Trousers round my ankles, threatening my senior hockey committee, saying basically "Any problems, lets sort this out now because I'm just not into this." (Josh)

There are consequences for anti-jocks who make such a stand. As Bourdieu (1998) noted, acts of social differentiation "may generate individual antagonisms and, at times, collective confrontations between agents situated in different positions in social space" (p. 32). Those who conform to the commandments have access to the key power resources at Greenfields. For example, they select the teams thereby confirming or not the physical capital of the individual, signifying their location and value within the jock culture and enabling them greater opportunity to exchange this kind of capital for social capital. Thus, one punishment for those who challenge the hierarchy or break the Commandments is to be demoted to a lower team or dropped altogether. The anti-jock can then become an also-ran, not because of lack of ability but through non-compliance to the hierarchical group authority. Such public acts of group dominance provide a warning to deter others from adopting a similar stance:



I never felt part of the hockey club, and I don't think I was ever treated with a decent amount of fairness. Choosing teams at university is very controversial because you've got the club captain and team captain all pally-pally. If you're not in their group, then you're at a big disadvantage. It's very difficult to continually pull against the norm. I dropped out of hockey in the end because I didn't enjoy it. (Josh)

Like the sport scholars, these individuals are not completely shunned by the jocks as they do possess sufficient physical capital. But like them, they do not perceive themselves to be part of the core jock group. Unlike the also-rans, these students are not excluded from the social spaces occupied by jocks at key times, but are normally either placed, or place themselves, symbolically and physically on the margins of these spaces. However, as mentioned, if their antagonistic stance is too strong, these students risk a total exclusion from jock space.

### *Authorized Space: The Wannabes*

The boundaries of jock culture are permeable with the potential for movement between groups based on bodily performances. This permeability is exemplified by the status of the wannabes. Some students on the Greenfields Campus who are not studying for a degree in sport science or a PGCE in PE, constitute the "wannabes." Despite their initial outsider status, they are able to join this culture as long as they have sufficient physical capital and are prepared to adopt the values and behaviors of jocks. The wannabes, although small in number, tend to identify themselves as athletes and are willing to adhere to the Twelve Commandments. In contrast to their fellow non-jock students these are often mistakenly perceived as sports scientists:

A lot of people thought that I did sport science or PE when I first came here. Even now people say to me "So are you doing a degree in sport science?" And when I say "No actually I'm doing maths." They go "Oh!" (Kathryn)

Once established and having adhered to the Commandments 1 to 10, successful wannabes can even pursue Commandments 11 and 12 and thereby rise to the heights of captain or social secretary. Unlike the antagonistic anti-jocks, and the excluded also-rans, these students are permitted to sit in the sacred inner circle during social rituals and around the television in the Greenfields common room when it is occupied by the jocks:

I'd go over and sit there with them because I play hockey and because I'm a sports person. I'm classed as being someone who plays sport. Therefore, I know them all. So I can just go over and sit down and chat to someone. (Kathryn)

Wannabes must be willing to commit to the jock culture and the logic of its practices. At times, this can be problematic as it involves rejecting some elements of their own subculture and continually having to juggle their jock and non-jock identities. Difficulties arise when the two cultures clash. This often takes place on a Wednesday afternoon when the BUSA matches are played. The sport sciences timetable is organized so that Wednesday afternoons are free for BUSA sport. This is an indicator of the way in which the institutional culture operates to reinforce the expectation that jocks should be involved in university sport and thereby confirms and enables Commandment 1 to be achieved. Not all courses operate in this way. Non-sport scientists wishing to participate in BUSA may find that they have to miss a lecture to do so. For Kathryn, this policy is seen as discriminatory and reinforced the perception that only the sport scientists are the "real" athletes at Greenfields. However, as a wannabe, Kathryn is willing to



miss her lectures on a Wednesday afternoon in order to participate in BUSA competition, and adhere to Commandment 1: "I had to keep missing a lecture or two every Wednesday. I really want to play hockey. If you started turning round and saying 'Oh I can't play anymore on a Wednesday' then that's it, BUSA's over for you" (Kathryn).

Clearly, wannabes have to make sacrifices in order to adhere to certain commandments. These are deemed acceptable if it enables them to exchange their physical capital into social capital within this culture. The existence of the wannabes also shows how jock culture is constructed around the performing body in space rather than the ascription to some fixed antecedent such as membership of a particular degree course or social background. The *illusio* is available to all who are willing and able to conform. It also needs to be noted that the social space that jock culture dominates, from team membership and organization to the social spaces in which certain rituals are performed, are facilitated by the institutional infrastructure that assumes the sporting habitus of the sport sciences student and colludes in keeping these spaces open for them. This is a subtle process ranging from timetable allocation to facilitate BUSA participation, to the tolerant attitude displayed regarding the antisocial behavior of jocks in the spaces they dominate.<sup>3</sup>

### *The "Othered" Space: The Non-Jocks*

The majority of students not taking a sport science degree are rejected by the jocks at Greenfields. They, in turn, reject jock culture. For this reason we have defined them as the non-jocks. They occupy the space of the "other." This is important as according to the principle of alterity, jock culture *needs* non-jocks as a group against which to define their own identity boundaries in physical and symbolic social space by using "them" as a public reference point to highlight what "we" are not. Unsurprisingly, non-jocks tend to have a negative view of the sport scientists and view themselves as different.

They [the jocks] all used to go round in one big group, and drinking and being rowdy and doing naked quad runs, and for teachers you know we're not really that kind of breed. Living in halls as well, they made themselves very separate, the teachers and the sport scientists. It was very rare that they actually mixed. And certainly in the halls, quite a few of the non-sport scientists had a bit of a problem with the sport scientists. Just because they either didn't talk to them, or made too much noise, and they weren't very understanding of the situation that everyone else was in, especially teaching practice. It almost feels like you're not worth it. "You don't play sport—I'm not going to talk to you". "You don't get drunk, I'm not going to talk to you." I'm not like them and I wouldn't want to be. (Isabel)

The non-jocks have their own uniform (jeans, smart, casual clothes) that distinguishes them from the jocks. They often complain about the jock domination of the campus in general and particular spaces within it. For example, when live sport is shown on a big screen in the common room, little physical space is actually left for non-jocks to be present. On Wednesdays after BUSA games and when sports clubs hold their "socials" in the bar, the space can become intimidating to non-jocks because of the raucous, exhibitionist, and exclusionary behaviors of the jocks. Indeed, some non-jocks feel unable to enter the bar on a Wednesday night

They take over the bar on their socials, and they're really loud. They're really intimidating for the non-sport scientists, they're really unapproachable. They all go round in their one big clique. The blokes especially, they're actually quite big, and that makes it a little bit worse. They are completely intimidating, and you really know that you're either in or you're out. (Isabel)



On Wednesday afternoons there is a mass exodus of jocks to participate in BUSA matches. During these periods, previously excluded social spaces become available and the common room becomes the domain of the non-jocks. Even the jock's area by the television is momentarily colonized with nonsport programs being chosen for viewing. However, the culture reverts back to the norm a few hours later when the jocks return for their post BUSA socials. Although there tend to be groups among the non-jocks, there is no one group that has the status or dominance of the jocks. Certainly, none of these groups would dare openly challenge the jocks for "their" social space.

Non-jock social life is different. There is less pressure to drink large amounts in order to be accepted. This is often, for PGCE students, linked to the demands of the teaching courses, which requires commitment, responsibility, and professionalism. Like the sport scholars, the non-jocks follow a different set of rules than the jocks. Therefore, even though some non-jocks do take part in university sport, they do not integrate themselves into the jock culture as their commitments are to teaching rather than to the sports team.

There aren't any lectures that I can miss and so when they're on Wednesday afternoons, I have to say I'm sorry I can't play. And I feel really bad about that because I'm letting my side down but there's nothing I can do. Next term I doubt if I can play any of the BUSA matches. I mean Ann the netballer, I think she's very much like me. She gets involved with them because she's into sport but she knows the responsibility of the course. And she was prepared to give up netball because of her course. (Isabel)

It is unlikely that such a concern or such a decision would be made by a jock as it violates Commandment 1.

## Reflections

In this article, we have attempted to provide some insights into how a jock culture operates on one university campus and illuminate the ways in which this locates specific kinds of bodies in social space so as to construct a range of identity positions that facilitate its maintenance over time. Taken together, these positions construct an embodied identity within a network of power relations, with the performing jock body occupying the most highly visible, yet taken for granted, central space around which all other bodies are positioned according to their ability to meet the combined sporting and social requirements of this culture. Accordingly, we agree with Bourdieu's (1998) observation that, "The notion of *space* contains, in itself, the principle of a *relational* understanding of the social world" (p. 31).

Throughout our analysis we have drawn on Bourdieu's (1998) notion of *illusio*, or the act of being invested in a social game, to make sense of how cultural doxa is constructed and maintained through the interaction of bodies and the spaces in which they perform. We have also found it useful to combine Bourdieu's thinking with Low's (2003) notion of "embodied space" that she defined as "the location where human experience and consciousness take on a material and spatial form" (p. 10). Against this backdrop, we now wish to provide three points of reflection that can contribute to our understanding of the relationships between the body, space and culture as evidenced in our study. These concern the following: the constitutive aura of constructed space and the spatial *illusio* of embodied jock space; the *illusio* of the collective embodied jock space and its colonizing and patriarchal features; and finally, the powerfully conformist tension present in the "specter of spatial liminality" that must be negotiated by all individuals within this social space regardless of their position in relation to this culture at any given time.



With regard to the notion of space as culturally constitutive, doxa, and the *illusio* of embodied jock space, we suggest that at Greenfields, social spaces are constructed by bodies but these spaces, once constructed, also facilitate the construction of bodies in a mutually reinforcing cycle of social regeneration. This is consistent with Löw (2006) who contends, that "there is much to indicate that institutionalized spatial orderings/arrangements in turn affect bodies" (p. 129). At Greenfields, many of these spatial orderings take on a life of their own (e.g., the bar area in the common room). These spaces open up as performative arenas at certain times and in so doing can be seen to act as constitutive forces, facilitating the construction of an *illusio* of embodied jock space in which certain body performances of jock culture are enacted as an unquestionable practical logic or doxa.

A number of these spaces (e.g., the student common room) have become centrally enshrined in jock culture folklore where the reenactment of heroic jock exploits has taken place for generations. The aura of such spaces is quickly reaffirmed for newcomers through social initiation rituals that form part of the annual cycle of sports practice in the university clubs that feed this culture. In this way, the *illusio* of embodied jock space is reciprocally constructed through the coming together of past actions deposited in the bodies and minds of the actors who inhabit the space and also in the physical properties inscribed on the space itself. For individual students, the psycho-physical aura of a space that is loaded with the imagery of past actors and actions undoubtedly contributes to its identification as an embodied jock space. First-year students are quickly sensitized to this aura through the recycling of folklore stories of previous jock exploits alongside direct experiential immersion into reinvented performances.

In this sense these spaces provide a physical canvas upon which to project past, present, and future actions of a particular kind. Moreover, jock space is identified because it facilitates the practical enactment of jock cultural rituals, making it especially suitable and, therefore, worth colonizing. For example, the colonization of the television area is an ideal place for a group whose identity is associated with certain elite media sports. As such, the positioning of a large TV screen in such a way as to facilitate a large viewing audience is important. To be colonized this social space must be sufficiently unregulated so as to be accessible to key members of the jock culture so they can both take control of the TV and organize the seating to secure and demonstrate positions of hierarchy.

Aspects such as the proximity to a bar and the protection offered by the small campus "closed-to-general-public clientele" greatly facilitates the preservation of this space as embodied jock space, making it ideal for watching international sports events and safely colonizing it for post-match socialization. Of course, behind the *illusio* of this embodied space, lies an interaction order that has been shaped through years of spatial interaction to the extent that this space 'exists' in a way that suits jock culture. It might added that numerous pubs and clubs in the town, for commercial gain, are similarly predisposed to allow the jocks to occupy their space in similar ways, but not normally to the same degree.

Turning now to the *illusio* of the collective embodied jock space and its colonizing and patriarchal features we suggest that the cultural phenomenon we have analyzed concurs strongly with Löw's (2006) conclusions that "power relations form a central component of the constitution of spaces" (p. 129). As noted, such spaces, once formed by bodies play a reciprocal role in (re)forming bodies. The *illusio* constructed by the emphasis on collectivity in jock culture is, we feel, noteworthy, especially in an institutional culture that is so heavily predicated on the ideology of individualism. This is especially evident if we take the definition of colonization provided by Shilling and Cousins (1990) as involving "the imposition by particular groups of students of cultural values and forms of behaviour which run counter to the norms" (p. 414).

We have noted elsewhere (Sparkes et al., 2007) that the submission of self-interest to the group ritual is a key feature of the jock *illusio* facilitated by and maintained in these spaces that



goes far beyond the sporting notions of "team spirit." One of the consequences of this is similar to that noted by Durkheim in relation to his studies of religion where, at certain times, a "collective effervescence" is generated from the exclusivity of the presence of particular types of bodies, all momentarily united in their dispositional, physical, and emotional submission to this sub-cultural doxa (see Shilling & Mellor, 1998). As such, it is interesting to consider the power effect of the collective effervescence constructed by bodies as they occupy jock space. As Low (2003) observed, "the space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions" (p. 10).

As the findings of our study suggest, these bodies and their dispositions are often physically large, powerful and assertive (relative to the rest of the student population). In their combined form (as an aggregate jock body or corpus) they easily expand to colonize and police space at Greenfields, both physically and symbolically. Indeed, Following Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) we note that the force of the *illusio* of the collective embodied jock space is often at least as strong for those who are marginalized or excluded as it is for its core members (the male jocks) and, as such, forms a practical doxa. This is so because as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) explained.

When it [doxa] realizes itself in certain social positions, among the dominated in particular, it represents the most radical form of acceptance of the world, the most absolute form of conservatism . . . There is no fuller way of finding natural conditions of existence that would be revolting to somebody socialized under other conditions and who does not grasp them through categories of perception fashioned by this world (p. 74).

Of course, in many instances this is precisely what has happened for the non-jocks who, in spite of their revulsion, have nevertheless at least partially accepted this domination by removing themselves from jock cultural space at certain key times, thus facilitating spatial colonization.

The collective *illusio* (as doxa) also goes to the core of jock culture by the way in which the performing male and female sporting bodies come together as the collective body in space. However, as Shilling (1991) has argued, "space is not simply an environment in which women and men interact, but is *constitutive of gender relations*" (p. 40). The embodied jock space is gender dominated by its symbolic and practical logic being exclusively taken from dominantly masculine associated practices and ideologies related to certain male dominated sports. But, the *illusio* does seem to operate in ways which make concessions to the female jock who is prepared to submit to the group culture and adopt these practices themselves via adherence to the Twelve Commandments.

This process appears consistent with Demetriou's (2001) critical re-reading of Connell's (1995) influential work on the internal/external relations of the gender order in Western culture. Here, the hegemonic block is constantly shifting alliances and seems to make concessions without necessarily changing the underlying symbolic structure of categorical difference that forms the basis for patriarchal dominance. That said, it should be noted that this is not entirely illogical as in certain ways female jocks also gain protection from being a group member rather than being an individual on the outside. In this sense, female jocks seem to accept a degree of gender subordination in exchange for the security of the group and the degree of empowerment that this provides in relation to accessing jock space and attendant identities while at Greenfields. Therefore, while the *illusio* here is one of equality, it is "thinly" veiled even for its core members. In reality, jock culture polices a particular archetype of sporting male and female body and identity in and out of these spaces.



Set against such features is the specter of spatial "liminality." With regard to liminality, all individuals are constantly being positioned and positioning others. Whereas the cultural *illusio* of embodied jock space is of a relatively fixed position adopted or assigned in a social space, the underlying process we observed at Greenfields is much more dynamic and requires action on the part of both the individual and the group to maintain identity stability. Though often tacit, this process is constant and means that individuals must negotiate what we might refer to as "liminal space" specific to this context.

Anthropologists such as Turner (1979) considered the idea of liminality as central to human conduct defining it as, "Literally 'being-on-a-threshold' . . . a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day to day cultural and social states and processes" (p. 465). Elsewhere, Douglas (1966/2002) used the term to help illuminate the spatialized process of *boundary violation* where human actors find themselves (perilously) outside of the categories perceived as "normal" for a given group and context. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's (1968) notion of *interspaces*, and Bourdieu's (1998) uses of the idea of spaces between spaces, all emphasize the generative function of liminality. As Turner (1979) stated, "Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play" (pp. 465-466). For example, many students experience liminal space where their identity is "on hold" while they (re)try for a team place, undergo the rites of passage of jock initiation rituals, recover from an injury, try to become a sport scholar while at university, push to be a professional athlete, or miss group social activities for other reasons such as exams or coursework or family commitments. For these individuals the transition from one embodied space to another is always possible, and the stability of staying in one space is never guaranteed. This all requires constant monitoring and gives rise to a constant identity tension.

By definition, the embodied spaces created by the *illusio* of jock culture are permeable and transitory. Ultimately, students must at some point leave university and as a result leave their position in relation to jock culture. Although for some, such as the also-rans or the non-jocks this may be liberating, for others such as the jocks themselves this transition again places them in a liminal space and, as individuals, they must reestablish their (sporting and occupational) identities in others spaces. Some jocks reach legendary status and are individually identified in the folklore of Greenfields, whereas others become assimilated into the *illusio* of the collective embodied jock space. Both of which then become the embodied sociospatial legacy for the next generation of would-be jocks to inhabit on entry to the Greenfields campus. As such, the song remains very much the same in terms of body-space-identity dynamics that prevail and this conservative process warrants further inquiry in the future.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

### Notes

1. As Bourdieu consistently argued these constructs are central to his social theorizing. In this article, we assume a familiarity with these concepts. More extensive definitions and applications can be found in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). Alternatively, a more introductory overview can be gained from Tomlinson (2004).
2. Unless otherwise stated, the quotes are from students studying for a BSc in Sport Sciences. All names are pseudonyms.



3. It is worth qualifying that these institutional tolerances do not pass without struggle. Many staff have tried to harmonize sport sciences teaching timetables with the rest of the university and a number of social rituals have been banned in these spaces on a number of occasions. However, these rituals and practices have merely "gone underground" to other more tolerant spaces (such as certain pubs and clubs in the city) only to reappear again gradually after a short time.

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